

Shadyside Presbyterian Church  
Northeast corner of Amberson Avenue and  
Westminster Place  
Pittsburgh  
Allegheny County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-432

HABS  
PA  
2-PITBU  
22-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## SHADYSIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HABS  
PA  
2-Pittbu  
22-

Address: Northeast corner of Amberson Avenue and Westminster Place, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Shadyside Presbyterian Church.

Present Use: Church.

Brief Statement of Significance: The Shadyside Church is a fine example of a late nineteenth century suburban church designed by the noted Boston architectural firm of Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge. Supported by a devoted congregation, it is a landmark in the development of the Protestant auditorium church.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Original and Subsequent Owners: 1890 to present - The Shadyside Presbyterian Church.
- B. Date of Erection: 1889-90.
- C. Architect: Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge.
- D. Notes on Original Plan and Construction of Building: "The Shadyside Presbyterian Church design submitted by Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge, was judged the winner of a competition held in the summer and fall of 1888. The contract was let April 18, 1889, and the completed 'edifice' dedicated Thursday evening, December 18, 1890." (See the SAH Journal, Fall 1958, p. 22.)

The following description is taken from "Shadyside Church," an article in the Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette (December 15, 1890), p. 3:

"On next Thursday evening, the dedicatory services for the new Shadyside Presbyterian Church at the corner of Aiken Avenue (now Amberson Avenue) and Westminster Street will take place. Great preparations have been made and the event will be a memorable one in the history of the Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh. The congregation are justly proud of the edifice that has been erected, and it is without question, one of the finest architectural designs that there is in the city.

"It is a model of beauty. Its style of architecture is the Romanesque and it is built of Beaver Sandstone of a selected

quality. It is modelled after the famous church of the Rev. Dr. Phil Brooke at Boston (Trinity Church, designed by H. H. Richardson).

"A tower 100 feet high rises from the center of the building. Arches are sprung from the pillars of the tower and the interior of the church is shaped not unlike a maltese cross. From the floor to the top of the dome 62 feet. The auditorium has a seating capacity in the main floor of about 1,000. No galleries or balconies mar the interior of the structure, and it is a model of beautiful simplicity.

"In addition to the new church, a chapel constructed of the same material and connected with the main edifice by a corridor, will be erected on the site of the first chapel, which is yet standing. The new chapel will seat 600 additional. The basement of it will be divided off into parlor, dining room and kitchen which will be used for social gatherings. The work on this building will be commenced in early spring. The entire cost of both structures exceptive of furnishment is to be \$105,000."

E. Notes on Known Alterations and Additions with Dates and Architects:

- 1892 Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge, architects--a new chapel, connected to the church by a Romanesque covered walkway, was completed in July.
- 1920 Much of the present stained glass was installed.
- 1937-38 Eyre and McIlvaine, architects (Philadelphia)--new offices to accommodate the administration of church affairs were added to the eastern end of the main structure. The interior was remodeled including addition of the semicircular apse with its handsome gold mosaic, and the addition of choir gallery in the west wing.
- 1952 Hoffman and Crumpton, architects (Pittsburgh)--the chapel and Sunday School were remodeled and several new offices and a parish hall were constructed in a modernized Romanesque style.

F. Sources of Information:

- J. D. Forbes, "Shepley, Bullfinch, Richardson, And Abbott, Architects; An Introduction," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, XVII, no. 3 (Fall 1958), p. 22.
- Montgomery Schuyler, "The Romanesque Revival in America," The Architectural Record, Vol. I (Oct.-Dec. 1891), p. 153.
- "Shadyside Church," Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette (December 15, 1890), p. 3. A rendering is included.
- James D. Van Trump, "The Mountain and the City: The History of The Shadyside Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, As Seen

Through Its Architecture." Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, Vol. 44, no. 1 (March 1961), p. 21.

Prepared by John D. Milner, Architect  
National Park Service  
August 1963

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Shadyside Presbyterian Church is a fine example of the post-Richardsonian Romanesque Revival work of the noted Boston architectural firm of Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

### B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories, layout, shape: One story with a large central lantern; cruciform auditorium plan.
2. Foundations: Stone masonry - rock-faced random ashlar where exposed above grade.
3. Wall construction: Rock-faced random ashlar, dark gray in color. Corbel table extends across west (front) wing, framing the gable, and across each side of the lantern tower, just below the cornice. Splay extends around the tower, just below the clerestory windows (coursed cut ashlar, regular course heights).
4. Structural system, framing: Great round masonry arches bound the central cube and support the lantern walls and the timber roof structure above. The four minor wings have masonry bearing walls supporting the timber roof structures (non-structural Guastivino vaults appear on the interior of these wings).
5. Stoops: Plain stone entrance platform (four steps high) on the west (front) elevation. Arcaded walkway connects the chapel on the east to the entrance in the east wall of the south wing. Short arcaded walkway also connects the small gabled vestibule on the south of the west (front) wing to the entrance in the west wall of the south wing.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance on the west (front) elevation. Massive triple-arched openings, the center and larger being the doorway--banded rock-faced stone voissoirs with delicately carved (foliate motif) stone archivolt. Intrados consists of concentric chevron molding and carved curtain arch springing from imposts supported by twin colonnettes (cushion capitals) resting on plinth blocks above the water table. Heavy wooden doors with elaborate ornamental iron hinges. Secondary entrances to the auditorium and primary chapel entrance located on the south side--broad round arched openings with banded rock-faced stone voissoirs supported by colonnettes (cushion capitals).
- b. Windows: Giant wheel window at the center of the west gable end, above the corbel table--outer ring of ten circular openings, inner ring of ten small trefoil openings around a center multifoil opening, the whole surrounded by a large frame of the same character as the entrance below, and flanked by small two-light rectangular openings with center colonnette. The broad arched openings flanking the main entrance have trefoil windows with center colonnette, and have the same frame and trim as the entrance. The north and south gable ends have tall slender trefoil openings with center colonnettes, all flanked by single slot windows. A band of arched clerestory windows extends around the central lantern just above the splay--seven windows on each side, separated by colonnettes. All windows have decorative stained glass.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The central lantern has a very steeply pitched four-panel pyramidal roof, flaring slightly at the eave line and surfaced with gray slate. Each minor wing has a gable roof with stone coping and circular finial (with an inserted cross) at the peak, all surfaced with gray plaster.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Simple molded and denticulated stone cornice projects slightly at the eave line of the central lantern.
- c. Dormers: Hooded ventilating dormer at the mid-point of each lantern roof panel; very severe lines, flaring slightly at the eave line, and surfaced with gray slate.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Cruciform auditorium plan of a large central cube and four minor wings. Central aisle with two secondary parallel aisles. The west wing is the deepest, and accommodates the narthex and choir gallery. The east wing contains the semicircular apse.
2. Stairways: Twin dogleg stairs lead to the choir gallery. A small utility stair is located on the south side of the chancel, and leads to the basement
3. Flooring: The auditorium floor is flagstone laid in 18" squares. The chancel floor is marble tile laid in diagonal pattern.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Interior wall finish is smoothly cut stone block (regular course heights), light gray in color. The side wings and chancel wing have Guastivino vaults. Deeply coffered lantern ceiling, formed by the intersection of paneled wood beams.
5. Doorways and doors: Decorative paneled and glazed double doors lead from the narthex to the auditorium. Handsome eight-panel double doors located to the north of the chancel lead to the parish offices.
6. Decorative features and trim: Elaborate carved (foliate and geometric patterns) compound stone arch framing the apse; handsome gold and gray mosaic covers the concave surface of the apse; the magnificent stained glass windows have rich coloring and detailing; delicate carved screen and balcony rail in the west wing between the auditorium and the narthex; handsome bracketed and paneled stone pulpit with delicate carved hood.
7. Lighting: Four circular chandeliers in the auditorium, two in the north and south wings, and four in the west wing. The apse and chancel have modern indirect lighting.
8. Heating: Modern central heating.

D. Site

1. Orientation and general setting: Situated, facing west, on the northeast corner of Amberson Avenue and Westminster Place, in a quiet and well-groomed residential suburb of Pittsburgh.
2. Landscaping: The church building and adjoining administration and Sunday school facilities are surrounded on the north, south, and west by flat lawns with tastefully appointed trees and shrubbery.

Prepared by John D. Milner, Architect  
National Park Service  
April 1963